The Empire's New Clothes.
How Austria-Hungary's Legacy
Kept the Successor States Running

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It was not long after the formal start of the unification of Greater Romania in the Summer of 1920[1] that the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs faced uncomfortable inquiries from the new South Slav state. Yugoslav lawyers began to ask whether they could represent clients at court in some Romanian regions. The number of petitions was large enough that bureaucrats in Bucharest – lacking the necessary expertise to answer – should have sought the advice of the Ministry of Justice. Yet, as the inquiries pertained to the peculiarities of the situation of the courts in Bukovina, a northern province of the county and part of Habsburg Austria until 1918, the Ministry of Internal Affairs instead transmitted their letter to the unification commission in Cernăuți, the provincial capital. The response was honest and open. It admitted that lawyers from the South Slav state were indeed entitled to represent clients at courts in Bukovina as long as they held a degree from a former Austrian university. The regulations that had been inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and which remained in force in Bukovina, made it an explicit condition of practice there. Since many of the lawyers now living in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes had attended such universities (in Zagreb, Graz, Vienna, and Prague) they were entitled to come and practice, unlike Romanian lawyers, whose degrees originated from Bucharest, Iași, or from the former Hungarian universities of Cluj and Budapest.

However, continued the reply, lawyers living in Bukovina did not find it convenient to let these South Slav competitors work in the province. Further, and in a surprising twist, these lawyers were at the same time not in favour of abrogating the existing regulations as that

1 That is, with the dissolution of the Ruling Council (Consiliul Dirigent), the *de facto* government that administered Transylvania from 1 December 1918 until April 1920. See: Gheorghe Iancu, *The Ruling Council The Integration of Transylvania into Romania 1918-1920* (Cluj-Napoca: Center for Transylvanian Studies, 1995).

Emperor Karl leaving the Greek Orthodox cathedral in Czernowitz on August 6, 1917- fortepan.hu, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

would have let Romanian lawyers from Bucharest start practising in the province. Candidly, they proposed that the Ministry not abrogate the regulation, but rather remain silent in order to stem the influx of competitors from the 'Old Kingdom' and from neighbouring successor states alike.[2]

It is hard to believe this exchange of letters would have been unique at the time. All Habsburg successor states – from Poland to Italy and from Czechoslovakia to Romania – struggled with the unification of their legal systems, which had to be patched together from diverse elements that had, in part, originated within the Empire. What this correspondence reveals goes beyond the practical difficulties of this process of legal unification, or even the selfish motivations of a small professional group that attempted to safeguard its livelihood in dire postwar material conditions. The candidness of the Bukovina provincial body – which honestly admitted the continuing significance of imperial legislation even though the new Romanian state drew its legitimacy from the claim that all links with the former Empire had been eliminated – makes this case an excellent example of what I will try to highlight in this talk: the significance of the legacy of the Empire in shaping its successors beyond mere structural continuities.[3] First, the two letters project the geographic outlines of Cisleithania (from Dubrovnik or Ljubljana to the Ukrainian border) onto the territorial arrangements of 1920, as if the Empire had continued to exist, and they demonstrate how this imaginary map intersected with the postimperial boundaries of Greater Romania. Most importantly, it reveals the motivations and actions of individuals who stuck to what remained from the former state and how they sought to align the preservation of these remains with the new realities of the nationalizing successor states. One can presume the existence of a significant number of law graduates from Austrian universities and their clients with ties to Bukovina – significant enough to make the Foreign Ministry act upon their request. The provincial body's reply

2 Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale București (ANIC), Ministerul Justiției Inventar 1117 dosar 45/1920, p. 12. f. no. 4937/1920 Cernăuti.
3 See: Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2016); 'Forum: Habsburg History', *German History* 31/2 (2013): 225–239, 232–235. https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ght016

explicitly admits the continuous existence of aspects of the Austrian legal system and its procedural regulations (including the requirement that a legal representative act only with German language skills), and also how much it advantaged the local legal professionals, creating a small but stable monopoly for their services.[4] Finally, they also confess – very much like Dominique Reill's Fiuman elites did[5] – their intent to join Romania on their own terms instead of simply accepting what the new state's leaders wanted, and to use what was left from the imperial order to achieve their goals. We do not know yet, without further research, whether they were more successful than the Fiumans, but I hope to offer at least partial clues for such a comparison.

Thus, in this talk I try to explore the local aspects of these entangled stories. Before turning to the admittedly patchy presentation of further small-scale events, it is worthwhile and fair to outline briefly how this research forms part of a broader trend, a sort of resurrection of Habsburg Studies. The Habsburg Empire is long dead – and for decades it was left undisturbed by historiography as well. Its demise was inevitable and logical, either because history favoured national freedom and nation-states, or because its internal contradictions remained unresolved, and maybe it was even impossible to reconcile the oppositions within it, as the consensus held.[6] With this question settled, research on its long history – and depending on where we set the birth date of this conglomerate, it could have existed for more than 600 years – did not stop, but the problems it offered for study were much less thrilling than a series of other topics for further generations of historians. Instead of the fascinating question of why this Empire, without which it was impossible to conceive of the image and power dynamics of Europe for almost 400 years, finally collapsed, more practical ones of its existence remained in focus.

Yet, recent decades have witnessed a reinvigoration of the field and the emergence of what can probably be called New Habsburg Studies.

Innovative ideas that promised to spill out into other fields – like the concept of national indifference, entangling history with nationalism studies – were born from the study of the Empire's centuries of existence.[7] New Imperial History, another relatively recent trend, accepted the realm of the Habsburgs not as a peculiar construct that was anything but a real empire despite its ambition, but as a legitimate member of this exclusive club, the history of which offers important conclusions for a more general understanding of the phenomena of empire and imperialism.[8] Together, the main novelty emerging from these trends is a state that was not ailing and outdated, nor doomed to disappear, but rather one that was looking for more than mere survival: experimenting with solutions for difficult problems (like non-territorial autonomy), engaging with its changing society (state-society interpenetration, but also electoral reforms), participating in the global system of the creation and transfer of knowledge, setting the foundations of a "liberal empire" aimed towards the Balkans and the Middle East, and so on.[9]

One must admit that these works usually describe the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy. Dualist Hungary has remained an outcast, hard to integrate with the Cisleithanian developments.[10]

4 See in more detail in: Francesco Magno, 'The 'Juridical Field', Everyday Ethnicity, and Imperial Legacies in Interwar Romania', *East European Politics and Societies* (forthcoming).

5 Dominique Reill, *The Fiume Crisis. Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2020).

6 Robert J. Evans, 'Remembering the Fall of the Habsburg Monarchy One Hundred Years On: Three Master Interpretations', *Austrian History Yearbook* 51 (2020): 269–291. See also: John Connelly, *From Peoples Into Nations. A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

7 'Forum: Habsburg History'; Laurence Cole, 'Visions and Revisions of Empire: Reflections on a New History of the Habsburg Monarchy', *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018): 261–80. doi:10.1017/S0067237818000188; Marteen van Ginderachter and Jon E. Fox (eds.), *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019).

8 Ulrike von Hirschhausen, 'A New Imperial History? Programm, Potenzial, Perspektiven', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41 (2015): 718–757; Benno Gammerl, *Staatsbürger, Untertanen und Andere. Der Umgang mit ethnischer Heterogenität im Britischen Weltreich und im Habsburgerreich 1867–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

9 Peter Becker, 'The Administrative Apparatus under Reconstruction', in: Franz Adlgasser and Fredrik Lindström (eds.), *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond. Bureaucracy and Civil Servants from the Vormärz to the Inter-war Years* (Vienna: ÖAW Verlag, 2019), 233–257; John Deak, *Forging a Multinational Empire. State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); Wolfgang Goederle, 'Postwar: The Social Transformation of Empire in 19th Century Europe. Scientific Knowledge, Hybridity and the Legitimacy of Imperial Rule', *Acta Histriae*, 28/4 (2020): 511–540; Jan Surman, *Universities in Imperial Austria 1848-1918: A Social History of a Multilingual Space* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018); Csaplár-Degovics, Krisztián, Jusufi, Lumnije, *Das ungarisch-albanische Wörterbuch von Zoltán László (1913). Imperialismus und Sprachwissenschaft* (Vienna: ÖAW Verlag, 2020), and the NTAutonomy ERC Starting Grant project under Börries Kuzmany's leadership.

10 Bálint Varga, 'The Two Faces of the Hungarian Empire', *Austrian History Yearbook* 52 (2021): 118–30. doi:10.1017/S0067237820000545; Bernhard Bachinger, Wolfram Dornik and Stephen Lehnstaedt, 'Einleitung. Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen', in: Bernhard Bachinger, Wolfram Dornik and Stephen Lehnstaedt (eds.), *Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen. Nationalismen und Rivalitäten im Habsburgerreich um 1900* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 9–24.

Its homogenizing, compact nation-state stood in stark contrast to the more divided and malleable Austrian conglomerate of provinces. It is admittedly difficult to find a way to narrate these stories as a single, coherent tale of an empire instead of the story of permanent conflict between two states.

Whatever one thinks about the merit of these trends,[11] the Habsburg Empire is definitely back on the map, and it is evident that my talk is indebted to this development. The main question I pursue – together with a team of eight other scholars – is related to the legacies of the Empire as we see it today and its impact on its successors, often conveniently and not without justification labelled as mini-empires.[12] Its focus is the local and the regional, and it seeks to answer how local societies found their place and role within the new Habsburg successor states and how much they shaped statehood after 1918.

While I believe that looking backwards from this vantage point of the collapse of a state could help foster a more unifying narrative of the Dualist Empire through the commonalities of local contexts, in this talk I will look for such continuities mostly in terms of interaction between the state and society and its agents, be they individuals or groups or institutions. First, I will very briefly outline the better-known structural continuities the successor states struggled with and often did not resolve before the Second World War. Against this backdrop I will start with brief individual biographies that demonstrate how people from different backgrounds acting within different fields capitalized on what was left of the Empire. However, their post-1918 stories reveal not only personal aptitude and cunning. They make palpable that this imperial legacy permeated the new states and shaped them from within and from without, often to their benefit in terms of stability and efficiency. I continue with institutions that highlight how the pre-1918 state-society relationship – that is, with reference to the existing forms and methods of state-society interpenetration – impacted on the statehood of Austria-Hungary's successors. Finally, I will try to bring together these trends into a relatively systematic

11 John Connelly and Robert Evans quite clearly contend that recent research with all its nuances should lead to the reconsideration of the traditional views on how nationalism brought about the demise of the empire. See: Connelly, 'From People's into Nations'; Robert J. Evans' contribution to 'Forum. Habsburg History', and idem, 'Remembering The Habsburg Empire'.
12 Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2016).

assessment of the contextual factors influencing the transition in order to evaluate the impact and durability of imperial legacies in a broader sense. Nevertheless, many of my conclusions remain tentative; I do not at this point pretend to offer a comprehensive picture.

Rule

It is not a recent discovery that the successor states struggled for a long time with the palpable legacies of the Habsburg Empire. The most obvious was the weight of the laws and decrees left in force by the new revolutionary administrations. In 1920, a successor state's default legal mode was pluralism, not unity. Only the new constitutions passed in the early 1920s conferred some cohesion to these legal systems. However, only the most important fields of state activity were unified, and often not in a lasting form: the judiciary, public administration, and education. The former provinces and their boundaries remained visible in courtrooms, on the pages of administrative orders (referencing the laws of defunct or foreign states), or from the (non-)existence of land registers.[13]

Public administration was usually the first to undergo a series of unification attempts, but also the one to undergo subsequent revisions as important aspects of statehood (including the jurisdiction of local administration, decentralization, devolution or even federalism, and so on) remained contested. Shifting internal political circumstances led to important changes: the introduction of counties (*župy*) in Czechoslovakia, the administrative reform attempts of the National Peasant Party in Romania, and, in Yugoslavia, the changes from provinces (*pokrajine*) to counties (*oblasti*) to *banovine* and their asymmetric administration. On the other end of this spectrum, the Austrian Republic became a federal state, not least because of the scare that leaders of the more conservative provinces received from Red Vienna, but also due to the experience of horizontal relations among crownlands before 1918.[14] Nevertheless, these attempts to

13 Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Hannes Grandits, Claudia Kraft, Dietmar Müller and Thomas Serrier (eds.), *Phantomgrenzen: Räume und Akteure in der Zeit neu denken* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).
14 Jana Osterkamp, 'Cooperative Empires. Provincial Initiatives in Imperial Austria' *Austrian History Yearbook* 47 (2016): 128–146; Jana Osterkamp, *Vielfalt ordnen. Das föderale Europa der Habsburgermonarchie (Vormärz bis 1918)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

satisfy political demands rarely touched upon the core issues of administration: the delineation of the jurisdiction of central state and local authorities and the political process of forming the decision-making bodies.

It is thus notable that despite their claimed unity and homogeneity, most of the successor states built structures of asymmetric rule in which the centre consciously applied different rules to different regions. Moreover, it happened not only informally – the structure was often formalized. Czechoslovakia is a case in point. Its easternmost region, Subcarpathian Rus, enjoyed nominal autonomy,[15] while Slovakia was administered by a plenipotentiary ministry until 1927. The ministry, its seat in Bratislava, exercised a broad range of executive powers, resembling the Ministry of Galicia of Viennese governments before 1918. In Poland, small but not insignificant differences existed behind a façade of administrative unity, particularly in autonomous Upper Silesia and in relation to the specific status of the East Galician voivodships.[16] Even in Romania, traces of devolved power were present in the form of regional general directorates that could apply varying administrative regulations to the erstwhile provinces. These directorates served as nodes in communication channels with Bucharest rather than as links in a direct chain of command running from the ministries to their subordinates. Informally, the situation was even more variegated, although more in local- and district-level circumstances and less so at provincial levels.[17]

Curiously, formal asymmetric rule did not depend on ethnicity, even if its most manifest forms clearly resulted from ethnic disparity (e.g., Galicia, Croatia, Slovakia, or Subcarpathian Rus). In Hungary, Budapest and its outskirts were treated not simply as a separate administrative unit, but the administrative and political system created

there was different from the rest of the country in terms of electoral rules, jurisdiction of the local government, provisioning, and the development of bureaucracy. The suburbs – while administered by the bureaucracy of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County in the form of districts – constituted a separate electoral constituency that employed secret ballots and party lists, contrary to the use of open ballot and single-member constituencies in the countryside after 1922. The provision of goods for these localities was merged with that of Budapest and managed through the General Consumption Cooperatives. City planning and development was not supervised by the county administration, but rather managed from Budapest with the aim of creating a unified metropolitan zone. Although there were practical aspects to this arrangement, the underlying reason was the social composition of the area and its political consequences: the dominant alliance of social democrats and liberals in the urban zone. But it was also a clear sign of how the rather conservative counterrevolutionary governments came to terms with the fact that, unlike the countryside, it was not possible to rule the metropoles with the methods of the late nineteenth century.[18] Even though the system of Austrian federalism was rather equal, "Red Vienna" had a position similar to that of Budapest. It was elevated to the rank of a province to separate the starkly different Viennese from provincial political and social milieus and avert serious political conflict, while informally the republic's western provinces were ruled asymmetrically as well.[19]

In the successor states, some of the political and administrative institutions of Austria-Hungary survived its demise for a relatively long time. In Galicia, local governments whose jurisdictions had been framed by Habsburg ordinances continued to operate after 1918. In 1927, the first local elections in the province were framed by the application of an only slightly amended version of the Habsburg local electoral law. Former imperial or state structures, especially in specialized branches of the administration such as railways, roads, and forests, continued to operate on the basis of extant imperial legislation and projects carried over from the pre-1918 era, be it the modification of a southern Moravian railway line or the lease contracts of the forests in north-eastern Transylvania.

15 Sebastian Ramisch-Paul, *Fremde Peripherie - Peripherie der Unsicherheit? Sicherheitsdiskurise über die tschechoslovakische Provinz Podkarpatská Rus (1918-1939)* (Marburg: Herder Institut, 2021); Stanislav Holubec, 'New State Borders and (dis)loyalties to Czechoslovakia in Subcarpathian Rus' *European Review of History/ Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 27/6 (2020): 732–762.
16 Jernej Kosi, Elisabeth Haid, 'State-Building and Democratisation on the Fringes of Interwar Poland and Yugoslavia. Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia from Empire to Nation-State' *Südostforschungen* 79 (2020): 29-67.
17 Francesco Magno, 'The 'Juridical Field'', Gábor Egry, 'Zárványok, hagyományok, szakemberek. A magyar közigazgatás és Nagyrománia működése', in: L. Balogh Béni (ed.), *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás*, (Budapest: Magyar Kormánytisztviselői Kar – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2021), 131–151.

18 Károly Ignácz, 'The Emergence of the "Outskirts of Budapest" as a New Administrative District through Food Supply, 1917–1919' *Südostforschungen*, 79 (2020): 71–95.
19 I am grateful to Chris Wendt for pointing it out during our project seminars.

Continuity was visible among the administrative personnel, too, often at the highest levels, sometimes as a result of the rapid rise of former lower-level officials within the ranks.[20] In some cases, it was more of a regional phenomenon (like Cisleithanian officials' influx into Prekmurje in 1919),[21] but in Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia such people constituted one of the pillars of the central administrations.[22] Others were treated as reliable administrators and as such transferred to distant regions or provinces where the state faced a shortage of competent officials. This was the reason for moving former Galician imperial officials to other parts of Poland, and for staffing the autonomous administration of Ruska Krajna with former Austrian officials of mainly – although not exclusively – Czech nationality.[23]

True, these successor states were often multi-ethnic, sometimes just as diverse as the former Habsburg Monarchy, adding to the list of imperial features they inherited. But for the purpose of this talk it is more important to note that locales regarded as peripheries within Austria-Hungary remained peripheral in the new successor states, while some central regions (e.g., Fiume, Czieszyn, the Banat) in the imperial framework became more or less peripheral after 1918.

Indeed, many of these continuities spilled out onto the local level. In this process they became entangled with the nationalizing efforts of the new centres of state power which aimed at creating the visible signs and homogeneous institutions of a nation-state in these localities, too. Therefore, nationalizing and imperial continuities shaped local societies, but the effect of continuities was hardly uniform, and they were often used by the centres to pacify or control regions and societies that were seen as unreliable. Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian electoral laws at the national level all made an effort to democratize suffrage compared to pre-1918 regulations but suppressed

the efforts of local governments either by retaining outdated laws (in the case of Hungary and Poland) or simply postponing elections (as in Romania). Such asymmetry was, however, not a novelty. It was an inherent feature of the gradual and tentative democratization of politics in both halves of the empire prior to its demise.

Curiously, Czechoslovakia – the state that most vehemently claimed discontinuity – was the state that seemed to replicate most of the political and structural characteristics of Austria. Czechoslovak politics, with the permanent, informal coordination mechanism of the five largest Czech parties, the so-called *Pětka*, meant a continuation of the influence of political parties on the administration, established during the late Habsburg era. Its pillarization tendencies, the distribution of state institutions among parties, and the creation of a broad range of associations dependent on the respective parties was comparable, even analogous, to the building of national institutions that were supposed to involve all co-ethnics prior to 1918. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia's eminently democratic local administration was restrained by a strong central administration that was barely responsible to local citizens – echoing complaints about Habsburg bureaucracy – and its administrators in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus professed a civilizing mission that resonated with that of the former imperial bureaucracy.[24]

People

At least as important as structural continuity was the fact that individuals within these structures could have had their own agendas, thus shaping practical statehood with their experience from before 1918. Let us start with some people who consciously capitalized on what they got from the empire before 1918 and who found ways to engage with the state for mutual benefit, ultimately also influencing the latter's modus operandi. A high-profile example is Leon Bilinski, Austrian Minister of Finance, who after 1919 became a zealous Pole

20 Vlad Popovici and Judit Pál, 'The Transformation of the Mid-level Civil Servants' Corps in Transylvania in the Aftermath of the First World War: The High Sheriffs between 1918 and 1925' in: Peter Becker, Therese Garstenauer, Veronika Helfert, Karl Megner, Guenther Steiner and Thomas Stockinger (eds.), *Hofratsdämmerung; Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 bis 1920* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2020), 155–78; Gabor Egry, 'Zárványok, hagyományok'.
21 Jernej Kosi, 'Summer of 1919: Radical, Irreversible, Liberating Break in Prekmurje/ Muravidék?' *Hungarian Historical Review* 9/1 (2020): 51–68.
22 Martin Klečacký, 'Im Dienste des neuen Staates? Beamtenkarriere im Prozess des Aufbaus der tschechoslowakischen Staatsverwaltung 1918–1920', in: *Hofratsdämmerung*, 137–153.
23 Holubec, 'New State Borders'.

24 Holubec, 'New State Borders'; Daniel Miller, 'Continuity and Cooperation in Post-Habsburg Czechoslovak Politics', paper presented at the ASEEES Summer Convention 2019, Zagreb, June 15; Éva Broklová, 'Die Tscheochoslowakische Parlamentsdemokratie und des Paramentarismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit' in: Franz Adlgasser, Jana Malinská, Helmut Rumpler, Luboš Velek (eds.), *Hohes Haus! 150 Jahre moderener Parlamentarismus in Österreich, der Tschechoslowakeiund der Republik Tschechien im mitteleuropäischen Kontext* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2015), 201–214.

The Benko family inn in Tešanovci/Mezővár. www.documenta-pannonica.eu

and managed, from the Polish side, the state's negotiations over the material legacy of Austria-Hungary. During the process, he disappointed his former colleagues with his staunch and unrelenting Polish nationalism.[25]

Local figures are less prominent in historiography, although they tell us at least as much as do prominent personalities like Bilinski. One example we know from Jernej Kosi's research: Josip (Jožef) Benko. Born in Prekmurje of peasant origin, his family ran an inn and a meat-processing facility, one they moved to the region's centre, Murska Sobota/Muraszombat in 1913. He served in the army during the First World War, but not on the front. He was dispatched to his home region where he was active in the requisitioning and provisioning branch of the army. This agricultural region was a backwater of Hungary, its society dominated by a large-estate-owning nobility and an influential Catholic clergy. The estates were well suited for animal husbandry, and proximity to the central strategic railways connected the area to the Adriatic, to Vienna, and to Bohemia. It was therefore crucial for the acquisition of food and leather, but also ripe for illegal activity, such as smuggling across the border between Cis- and Transleithania.[26] Benko climbed the ladder slowly but made a huge leap upward after the area was annexed to the South Slav State. Cutting a long story short, Benko soon became a local nabob: a money-lender, a land-, factory- and hotel owner, MP, in 1927 mayor of Murska Sobota, and an electoral agent of the Serbian governing parties.[27]

It is a spectacular story, and to a certain extent unique, even though the local elite in Prekmurje – here we must exclude the estate owners since they lived elsewhere – was less shaken by the transition than one would assume. Still, Benko became a key figure of the new regime, one who shifted from an outsider to a member of the elite.

25 Irina Vushko, 'Strangers among Friends. Leon Biliński between Imperial Austria and New Poland', in: Paul Miller and Claire Morelon (eds.), *Embers of Empire Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918* (Brooklyn, NY: Berghahn, 2018), 64–89.
26 Ibolya Murber, 'Westungarn/Burgenland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg: Politische Gewalt als Voraussetzung des Plebiszits über Sopron/Ödenburg' *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 13 (2020): 78-91.
27 Kosi and Haid, 'State-Building and Democratisation'.

Josip Benko (third from left) at the opening of the Murska Sobota King Aleksander stadium in 1936 with the representative of King Peter II, Lieutenant Colonel Milorad Stepanović (centre).
Photographer: Jerolim Purač. www.document-pannonica.eu okrajinski arhiv Maribor / Maribori Területi Levéltár SI_PAM/1524 Okrajno Gašper Lipovšek, TE 1 Signatura

But it is hard not to see how his career before 1918 helped him in his post-1918 efforts. The meat-processing family business certainly helped him to get assigned to the requisitioning branch, in a period when military requisitioning was not just crucial for the war. It required immense logistical and administrative effort from the state, and it was carried out in cooperation with the agricultural and commerce establishment: the state outsourced the purchase of goods – at prices set by the authorities – to the local traders, collected the products and redistributed them among food-processing plants and light industry, the army, industrial enterprises, and the urban and rural populations. The system was rife with conflicts between producers and merchants, urban and rural consumers, industries and the army, not to speak of the conflict between hoarders, smugglers, and the authorities.[28] Within this tangled web, that reached to the capital, Budapest, opportunities abounded to offer small or larger favours, collect bribes and establish lasting contacts; in other words: accumulate more than one type of capital.

During the transition Prekmurje, the most distant region in the new South Slav State, was often left alone just because of its distance from Belgrade. Land reform not only eliminated large estates; it removed the traditional landowning aristocracy from the social map of the region, offering an opening for aspiring figures. People with capital and connections found opportunities with the state, with former landowners, and newly rewarded peasants. The gap in the social fabric left by the aristocracy and the largely displaced former Hungarian administrative personnel made it easier to reach higher on the social ladder. But Benko's experience and wide network were valuable for the new regime as well. He turned into a replica of the local strongmen of the previous era, managing the electorate, procuring goods, offering sinecures, running bilingual newspapers,[29] directing state funds into development,[30] and maybe also softening the

28 Zsombor Bódy, 'Élelmiszerellátás piac és kötött gazdálkodás között a háború és az összeomlás idején', in: idem (ed.), *Háborúból békébe. A magyar társadalom 1918 után* (Budapest: Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközp, 2018), 151–194.
29 Papp József, 'A szlovéniai magyar könyvkiadás és sajtótermékek, kitérve a helyismereti kiadványokra (1884-1997)', in: Laki-Lukács László (ed.), *Helyismereti könyvtárosok IV. országos tanácskozása. Miskolc, 1997. július 23-25* (Szentendre: MKE Helyismereti Könyvtárosok Szervezete, 1998).
30 *Otvoritev telefonske centrale v Hodošu, v: Murska krajina*, 2/49 (December 3, 1933), 1.

effects of the transition on local people, who were not always happy to have to cope with the new state. People whose loyalty was still with Hungary had obvious reasons to feel disgruntled, but the local Slavic speakers were also unhappy with the assumption promoted by the new authorities that they were simply Slovenes and not a separate Slavic group. This conflict was especially aggravated as the new authorities refused to use the local dialect; instead they wanted locals to learn literary Slovene.[31]

Victor Hodor and Karel Cobori (Czobori Károly before 1918) are also prime examples of biographies built on knowledge and experience from before 1918, in their case drawing on lower-level administrative experience. Both of them were active in the Hungarian administration. Hodor was a Romanian-speaking Greek Catholic from Maramureș and district chief (*főszolgabíró*) in Subcarpathian Rus before 1918. Cobori was the mayor of the small city of Skalica/ Szakolca – incidentally the first seat of Vavro Šrobár's plenipotentiary Slovak Ministry in 1918, a fact that could have been advantageous for Cobori's subsequent appointments.

Their careers were different after 1918, not least because of the profound contrast between local politics in democratic but centralizing Czechoslovakia and autocratic Romania. Hodor held appointments as county prefect several times, was an expert on the unification committee of the Ministry of Interior (putting to use his knowledge of Hungarian administration), the regional general administrative inspector (a mid-to-upper-level ministerial position), and finally general secretary of the Someș province during the king's dictatorship.[32] He was first and foremost an expert in administration whose practical experience was certainly valued as his several appointments in "problematic" counties (mostly counties with a high share of non-Romanians) suggests. He was definitely adaptable and not overly political, making him an asset for administrations of every colour. As a ministerial official rather than a political figure, he was not as dependent on politics as other Romanian figures who constantly switched between higher administrative positions and political roles

as MPs.[33] For his advancement he needed only the goodwill and recognition of his superiors within the bureaucracy.

What makes his story even more fascinating is, however, his role in the administration before 1918. The fact that he was part of the Hungarian administration should not surprise anyone – Romanians (or, for that matter, Slovak-speakers like Cobori) were present within the administration, although their share of public positions was lower than their percentage of the population. But the district chief (*főszolgabíró*) – a position Hodor occupied before 1918 – was the usual horror figure of every story from dualist Hungary: the heavy-handed official who used gendarmes to chasten and discipline Romanian crowds, managing elections in favour of the government, and easily resorting to pressure and armed violence. Moreover, Hodor had a political role before 1918: he was the secretary of István Tisza's Party of National Labour in his district. Tisza also personified the most extreme alterity to Romanians.[34] Neither his position nor his political activity before 1918 had detrimental effects on Hodor's post-1918 career, probably because his expertise was in demand and maybe also because of his networks.

Cobori's case is similarly conspicuous. As mayor of Nitra he was elected to be chairman of the Association of Cities in Slovenkso,[35] an association including all cities of the new Czechoslovak province, even though before 1918 he had been a Hungarian national activist with artistic leanings, whose performances had found their way into the Budapest and regional newspapers. He held lectures on literature and conducted the local choir, often performing Hungarian patriotic songs, or during the war even German ones.[36] But mainly because the position of mayor of a so-called "town with a regulated council"[37] was

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31 Kosi and Haid, 'State-Building and Democratisation'.
32 Zoltán Györke, Györke, Zoltán, 'Prefecţii judeţului Cluj: analiza prozopografică', *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Bariţiu» din Cluj-Napoca"* 51 (2012): 305–323, 313–314.

33 Andrei Florin Sora, *Servir l'état Roumain, Le corps préfectoral, 1866–1944* (Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011).
34 Alexandru Vaida Voevod, *Memorii. III* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1994).
35 MTI Lapszemle (February 28, 1929), https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/Lapszemle_1929_02/ (accessed September 21, 2021.)
36 Az Újság (January 17, 1909), Petőfi Museum of Literature, Petőfi Collection, https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/PetofiGyujtemeny_B-28/ (accessed September 21, 2021); *Szakolcai Királyi, Katolikus Gimnázium értesítője az 1908-9 évről* (Szakolca: 1909), 12; *Esztergom* XIX. 47 (November 22, 1914), 5.
37 Hungarian administrative laws stipulated two categories of town: municipal towns, directly supervised by the Ministry of Interior and on an equal footing with counties, and "towns with a regulated council" with relatively broad autonomy, large and partly elected municipal council, but subordinated to the county and its district chiefs/captains.

on the boundary of politics and practical administration before 1918 and he served as the head of an elected representative body, he could concentrate on city management and style himself as a mere administrator. Often party politics were not very prominent within these bodies, and ethnic conflicts were subdued.[38] Thus, such a position could serve as a starting point in both directions: politics and public service.

In 1921, Cobori became the mayor of Nitra, the seat of the Catholic church in Slovakia and a city to be developed into a model for the new Czechoslovak state: modern, progressive, and representing Czechoslovak destiny.[39] Czechoslovakia was defined as the opposite of the stale pre-1918 empire. It styled itself as a vibrant, democratic, and modern society – anticlerical as well – and thus cities had to be transformed to fit these symbolic politics accordingly. Modern architecture and industry were juxtaposed with (supposedly) outdated feudalism, not to speak of the architecture of Catholic religious institutions.[40]

Thus, the position of the mayor went beyond the practical implications of city management. In Nitra, Cobori sat at the head of the effort to transform the city from baroque ecclesiastical centre into a modern Czechoslovak municipality. (When he retired, his name was associated with a slaughterhouse, the new palace of the postal service, a poorhouse, hospitals, river regulation and sewer system.) However, the mayoralty was an elected position, and the city council consisted of representatives of several parties. (Czechoslovakist Agrarian Party, the main political force of every coalition government, Slovak autonomist Slovak People's Party, Social Democrats, Communists, Christian Socialists representing mainly the Hungarian minority, a Jewish Party.) Nitra – with Catholics, both a numerous clergy and believers, visibly present in its cityscape and everyday life – was also a potential centre for a Slovak autonomism entangled with the

38 'Brassói Egységes Magyar Párt', in: István Vida (ed.), *Magyarországi Pártok Lexikona 1846–2010* (Gondolat – MTA-ELTE Pártok, Pártrendszerek Kutatócsoport), 42–43; Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, 'Spányi Artúr és az „eperjesi középosztály" a két világháború között' *REGIO* 23/1 (2015): 109–135.
39 *Nitra 1931* (Nyitravármegye Kiadása, 1931); see also Margita Gáborová (ed.), *Na zlome casu/Im Wandel der Zeit, Modernistické/antimodernistické tendencie v multikultúrnej Bratislave v medzivojnom odobi* (Bratislava: Universitá Komenského, 2012).
40 Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle. The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Catholic Church and opposed to 'official' Czechoslovakism.[41] One would think that political considerations of Czechoslovakist and Slovak autonomist parties wouldn't favour Cobori, given his past service in Hungary when part of the Catholic clergy was active in Hungarian minority parties.[42] But finally, it seems, his expertise in city administration and depoliticized city management – and not least his knowledge of the intimate details of Dualist Hungarian regulations still in force after 1918 – worked to his advantage. As did his possible contacts: the district captain of Nitra District when Cobori resigned in 1931 was Rudolf Halachy, a proud Hungarian nobleman who safeguarded the family diploma of nobility in his home and who was – under his Hungarian name Halácsy Rezső – a village notary near Skalica/Szakolca in 1918.

The careers of Hodor and Cobori (and Halachy) are examples of upward career and social mobility within the Habsburg successor states that were based in part on their expertise from the pre-1918 era. It was again a mutually beneficial arrangement, one that time after time helped the state to manage tricky local affairs (e.g., among Slovak autonomists, Hungarian Christian Socialists, and Social Democrats on the Nitra city council), and not just in terms of legal knowledge but also in handling local politics where informal rules and norms were important elements in a context unfamiliar to the representatives of the centre. But gaining advantage from familiarity with informal rules and customs was not the exclusive realm of state officials in, for example, Czechoslovakia, with its democratic and representative local governments, as shown by the example of Artúr Spányi from Prešov/Eperjes. Spányi, a prominent local figure before 1918, refashioned himself into a localist politician, claiming to represent the citizenry and not an ethnicity, successfully attacking national politics for its indifference to local issues. He built his effort on the pre-1918 tradition of depoliticized local politics, demonstrating that national issues and nationalist politics had still less salience at the local level than in the parliaments.[43] Spányi was not alone in

41 James M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Thomas A. Lorman, *The Making of the Slovak People's Party Religion, Nationalism and the Culture War in Early 20th-Century Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
42 Béla Angyal, *Dokumentumok az Országos Keresztényszocialista Párt történetéhez* (Dunaszerdahely: 2004).
43 Szeghy-Gayer Veronika, 'Spányi Artúr'.

this effort. Czobori himself established a local party in 1926 which competed in the local elections and could elevate him to the position of mayor as the compromise candidate of the warring factions. He created a tenuous balance which everyone feared to upset. Thus, when he resigned in 1927, he was invited by the council to stay, which he did until 1931. His successor was again a compromise figure from the Jewish party.[44]

Finally, we can mention Zsigmond Szana as the representative of provincial business elites, well connected at the imperial level before 1918. A banker in a thriving provincial centre, Temesvár/Timisoara, whose business was affiliated with the powerful Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank, he became instrumental in what turned out to be a relatively successful action to salvage business conglomerates owned by Budapest capitalists and divided among the successor states. Szana's bank was a hub for local businesses and seen as their entry point into broader financial networks. This made him a trusted partner of business elites – bankers and industrialists – from Budapest as well. The Banat was a thriving, fast-developing economic centre in Austria-Hungary; even a regional banker could be expected to have a broad range of international contacts[45] and experience with a diverse range of business partnerships.

After 1919, Budapest-owned businesses encountered difficulties. At first, the 'enemy' label was used to expropriate the property of Hungarian business elites that remained in the successor states. Somewhat later, under a so-called nationalization, companies were obliged to have majority ownership and majority board membership that accorded with the titular nation, i.e., control in nationally Romanian, Czechoslovak, South Slav, etc., hands. These provisions hit banks and industrial companies based in Budapest, which were active in the eastern parts of Dualist Hungary through branches, affiliated banks, and industrial factories established before 1918.

Before 1918 Romania was subject to intersecting efforts by French, English, German, and Hungarian capitalists to extend their

businesses there.[46] Hungarian banks and industrialists played an important role in this development, participating in the banking, forestry, oil, and textile industries. The process continued during the occupation of Romania after 1916. However, the strategy of many business leaders was to cooperate with their Romanian partners, and some of them retained these ties even during the occupation, when an alternative approach – more one-sided and exploitative – would have been possible, too.[47]

It is therefore hardly surprising that, after 1919, well-networked figures like Szana became instrumental in efforts to salvage businesses threatened by the new administrations. Their efforts were made easier when Romanian politicians pushed for nationalization, thus establishing an obligatory quota of Romanian citizens on boards of directors and among shareholders. Even though some clauses of the Treaty of Trianon would have allowed for outright expropriation, partial nationalization was beneficial for the original owners and managers, because with the help of their business partners, they could devise elaborate schemes that disguised their ownership in these key companies while they retained not just their property, but also participation in management. From Bucharest, the Bank Marmorosch and Blank (an institute close to the National Liberal Party and co-owned by the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank) and the Banca Chrissoveloni were crucial in these efforts, as was the Auşnit steel conglomerate.[48] These institutions took over shares nominally, as a kind of *Treuhand*, and managed to gain approval of new statutes and boards of directors from the government. But equally important were figures like Szana who were also able to take over shares, act as trusted representatives, and occasionally lend a helping hand in business financing.[49]

44 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* 5/48 (February 28, 1929); *Városok Lapja* 22/17–18 (August 1, 1927); *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* 7/ 220 (September 26, 1928), 6; *Egyenlőség* 52/32 (May 14, 1932), 13.
45 Gábor Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands. border-making, peripheralization and layered regionalism in post-First World War Maramureş and the Banat' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 27/6 (2020): 709-731.

46 Stephen Gross, *Export Empire. German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Hamlin, *Germany's Empire in the East. Germans and Romania in an Era of Globalization and Total War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
47 Hamlin:, *Germany's Empire*; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL), Pesti Magyar Kereskedelmi Bank (PMKB) Z41 34. cs. 421. t. f. 281.; 1164e/VII.
48 MNL OL PMKB Z41 190. cs. 1818 t. 2085r/XXVIII.
49 MNL OL PMKB Z41 841. cs. 4918/XXVIII-20, 4918 Letter from June 17, 1925, to the Kammer brothers. 843. t. 4918c/III-5.

The Reșița ironworks in 1914. fortepan.hu. Hungarian Museum of Geography, Mór Erdélyi Collection

As a result, as the boards of Transylvanian companies changed, more and more Romanian names figured in the yearly reports.[50] In practice, however, a few key personalities continued to manage their operation, and these non-Romanian figures were often coopted into the leadership of the emerging Bucharest-based Romanian national companies in several industrial sectors. What happened was not just the creation of a national economic space, but the merger of that imagined space with the pre-1918 (Hungarian) imperial one, although shared with Romanian partners. Romania's metal industry, for example, was dominated by the Titan, Nadrag, Călan ironworks, which emerged from cooperation of the Vienna-based Erste Österreichische Staatseisenbahngesellschaft (StEG), owner of the iron-works in Reșița, the Budapest-based Salgótarjáni Coalmines, the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank, the Banca Chrissoveloni in Bucharest, the Wiener Bankverein, and the Galați-based Titan works. It was an essentially transnational venture, initiated by STEG and not Romanian capitalists, but it mainly based its operation on its dominance of Romanian markets.[51]

Similarly, the largest textile conglomerate in postimperial Romania emerged from the otherwise insignificant Lugoj Textile Company. The factory was owned by the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank and the Kammer Brothers Textile Company – both from Budapest – with Szana on its board of directors. The company was established in 1911 at the initiative of the then-prefect of the county and liberal MP Zoltán Medve. After 1919, the Kammer brothers decided to use it as the base of their expansion into Romania. The Maramorosch and Blank Bank was there to help once more. It served as *Treuhand* of the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank and Kammer's shares, sold its textile works in Iași to Kammer, who in the meantime acquired two more factories in the parts of Upper Hungary that became Slovak

50 Máté Rigó, 'The Long First World War and the survival of business elites in East-Central Europe: Transylvania's industrial boom and the enrichment of economic elites' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 24/2 (2017): 250-272; MNL OL PMKB Z41 8 cs. 113 t. Letter to Leó Lánczy, September 9, 1920., 189. cs. 1912. t. 2885o/XXX. Memorandum on the future of the Kalán Rt.
51 See the yearly reports of the STEG in which the revenue from its Reșița operation, involved with Titan. Nadrag, Călan yielded the overwhelming portion of its profit. For the conglomerate MNL OL PMKB Z41 190 cs. 1814. t. 2085/IV, 2085ő/V-7, 2085ő; 1818. t.2085r/XXVIII.

territories within Czechoslovakia. To cut a long story short, they used the well-proven strategy of disguising ownership behind a tangled web of confidential private contracts and nominal ownerships, leveraging the influence of Bucharest business and political elites, and taking on the new Romanian local political and administrative elites. Thus, two local politicians, Petre Corneanu and Gheorghe Dobrin, who were alternating in the role of prefect for most of the 1920s, were simultaneously board members and shareholders. Their shares were provided as gifts from the company, and they also took significant sums as private loans from the textile business.[52]

Their role was obviously not managerial. As alternating prefects, they represented rival parties, ensuring that the Lugoj Textile Company always had the support of the local representatives of the government, whoever that was at a given moment. (If not, they could always bribe someone.) Lugoj was a huge success – at least for the Kammer brothers. One of them, Szigfried, was decorated with the Steaua României Order in 1928 for his efforts in building a flourishing Romanian textile industry – the profits of which landed exclusively abroad.[53]

Again, what we see is the conscious use of pre-1918 institutions and networks by Hungarian capitalists and Romanian business elites alike, with the tacit or implicit support of the government, to shape the new state's economy. Albeit less concretely 'imperial' than what happened to the administration, it was not much different from what Benko achieved in Prekmurje, not least because Hungarian capital was only starting to flirt with imperialist adventures on the eve of WWI. This difference in scale was rooted in the Banat's pre-1918 importance and developmental trajectory, which made it possible to integrate these efforts into postimperial economic networks that still retained Austria-Hungary's economic space. For local elites, however, the survival of high-level capitalist networks provided less opportunity than the reconfiguration of administration. Apart from selling their political influence both to Bucharest and to Budapest, and receiving concrete financial benefits in exchange, there was not much room to take over business and expand as Benko could do in Prekmurje.

52 MNL OL PMKB Z41 841. cs. 4918/XXVIII-20, 4918 Letter from June 17, 1925 to Kammer brothers, 4918/XXVIII-15, 842. cs. 4918a/II-14, 843. cs. 4918c/III-5.
53 MNL OL PMKB Z41 36. cs. 436. t. 842. cs. 4918/III-7, 4918a/II-2.

With the creation of larger conglomerates at the national level, local business elites were simultaneously facing the power of high-level capital and its managerial representatives in local factories.

Institutions

In addition to individuals, civic and administrative institutions played a key role at the local level in shaping state-society relationships. They affected practical statehood, the way people experienced the state through their interactions with its institutions, mostly the administration, as well as the form, style and methods of the institutions through which they managed these affairs. To a certain extent, the example of lawyers in Bukovina who attempted to safeguard their monopoly on legal services in the region – explored at the beginning of this talk – is a case in point. Existing legislation inherited from Cisleithania was used by the lawyers to safeguard a monopoly of access to key state institutions, in this case, the courts. This practice marked a difference in how access to courts functioned in other regions in Romania which did not receive the same legal inheritance. Without these laws, any attempt of the lawyers to protect their position would have either failed or would have had to rely on political mobilization.

However, I would rather outline here two cases on a different level, namely the fate of public notaries in Transylvania – a small group of legal professionals entrenched in a market marked by oligopoly and entrusted with corporatist autonomy – and voluntary firefighters, a typical sphere of lower-middle-class activism. Their importance lies in their role as places of the interpenetration of state and society.

Public notaries served in a given district and offered relatively cheap basic legal services, e.g., preparing authorized legal documents directly enforceable by courts, or managing legal processes like the execution of wills.[54] They were the obvious choice for ordinary people in such cases, being more accessible and less costly than lawyers. As their jurisdiction was delineated by a legal act of the state that relinquished part of the state's own jurisdiction, the notaries

54 Rokolya Gábor, *Magyar közjegyzők a Délvidéken* (Budapest: Magyar Közjegyzői Akadémia, 2017).

View of Nitra in 1925, Museum of the Piarist Order, Hungary – Hungarian National Digital Archive (MANDA)

in turn took over something from state power, thus creating a space of protected economic and legal autonomy. Their number was limited, and entry into the profession depended on the goodwill of the members – the chambers of public notaries had veto rights over new appointments and the creation of new posts. Sometimes, posts were used as sinecures for retiring politicians or political supporters, as in the case of a retired liberal MP of Romanian nationality, Pachomius Avramescu, who was considered a renegade by Romanian nationalists. His retirement in 1905 was partially caused by the high tide of successful anti-government agitation among Romanians in the Banat at the turn of the century, and Avramescu was probably looking for a safe economic haven for himself. But, curiously, he was left undisturbed in his post after his notarial district became part of Romania in 1919, which was ruled by his former political enemies now members of the Ruling Council, who in turn would have had enough incentive to vengefully remove and replace this national "renegade".

As the institution of public notary was present in all of the newly acquired provinces of interwar Romania, but absent from the Old Kingdom, it became contentious immediately after 1920. The central government had less interest in preserving it, especially as the new appointees of the Ruling Council – the Transylvanian regional government from 1918 to 1920 – were close to the political opposition. Faced with this existential challenge, public notaries were able to bridge ethnic divisions within their professional corps. Doing away with public notaries altogether threatened not only the professional and economic prospects of non-Romanians, but all public notaries irrespective of ethnic or national status. Interethnic professional cooperation and the lack of internal divisions allowed notaries to attempt mobilizing support from the population, too. They argued that their services were essential for the poor rural population. The abolition of the office of public notaries, and the transfer of its competences to the lower courts, would have negatively affected these groups. Instead, they recommended the extension of the institution to the Old Kingdom. They also demonstrated how public notaries were part of a broader francophone legal tradition that had been received in the Old Kingdom, like the Romanian Civil Code of 1865, which had
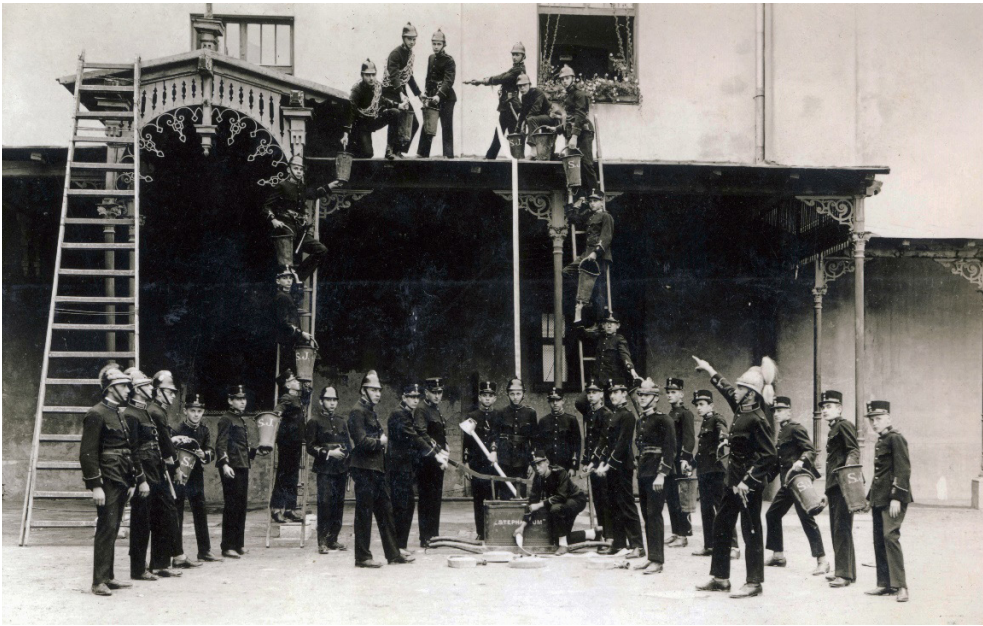
Voluntary firefighters in the Kalocsa Archdiocesan Gymnasium www.fortepan.hu Jezsuita Levéltár

been adapted from the Napoleonic Code.[55] However, their main point concerned accessibility and familiarity.[56]

During the process, a certain transethnic solidarity manifested itself. Hungarian notaries prepared memoranda sent to Bucharest with the approval of their Romanian peers. At one point, Romanian public notaries from Arad had to resort to litigation against the creation of new posts by Bucharest. They won their case with the help of imperial legal legacies: the verdict was based on the Hungarian law regulating the office of public notary[57] because the individuals concerned had occupied their posts in pre-1918 Hungary.[58] However, the final compromise between public notaries and the state shifted the balance towards the latter. While the complete abolition of the office was avoided, the notaries had to accept the limited intervention and larger influence of the central state on their profession and abandon the dream of the extension of public notaries to the Old Kingdom.

Voluntary firefighters, by contrast, were a mass movement in the Habsburg Empire, but unknown in the Old Kingdom. In every city and in many villages these associations provided natural disaster prevention, while their activities beyond their service became cherished elements of middle-class leisure culture, including brass bands, local balls, and trips. By 1918, some voluntary firefighter associations were integrated into city administrations as specialized services that included a few paid firefighters. Still, voluntarism remained an essential part of their ethos in the postimperial period. Being a member was a matter of pride and status in local social contexts.

As the firefighters in the Old Kingdom were considered military units – i.e., they operated under the direction of the army – the General Staff viewed the Transylvanian volunteer organizations through this lens. As a consequence, they wanted to disband these

55 Constantin Iordachi, *Liberalism, Constitutional Nationalism, and Minorities The Making of Romanian Citizenship, c. 1750–1918* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
56 Gábor Egry, 'Fallen between Two Stools? Imperial Legacies, State-Society Relationships, and the Limits of Building a Nation-state in Romania after the First World War' *Südostforschungen* 79 (2020): 4–31.
57 Law 1874: XXXV, and 1886: VII. on public notaries.
58 ANIC Ministerul Justiției Direcția Judiciară, inventar 1117, dosar 175/1919, fol. 208–211.

voluntary associations across Transylvania, claiming that they were irredentist paramilitary organizations. It was true that in many cases – given the ethnic composition of the urban middle class, among whom Hungarian- and German-speakers often constituted a majority – the associations were tilted towards non-Romanian members and used Hungarian or German as language of command. However, the General Staff's order encountered unexpected resistance from everyone, not just from non-Romanians. Finally, facing an uphill battle, the military relented and permitted the continued existence of these associations, albeit under less strict military supervision.[59]

With the success of the Transylvanians, the extension and partial transformation of the institution presented itself. The ongoing professionalization of the firefighting service and the growing demand for natural disaster prevention – a significant feature of the 'modern state' that Romania wanted to embrace – made it possible to push for the stronger integration of firefighters into official state-administrative structures. In the Banat, where the revolt against the disbanding order was extremely strong, the leaders of the volunteer firefighters in Caransebeș (a small city in the southern part of the region and former seat of the Romanian border regiment) convinced the prefect to establish a county-wide association of firefighters, with the prefect as its head. It extended the network of associations to the countryside, and installed city mayors as regional firefighter inspectors *ex officio*, augmenting their nominal chairmanship of urban associations. The idea was to ensure uniform operation and concerted effort: the solution was not the state alone, but rather a new balance between state and society. This time, the non-state actors extended their jurisdiction, while building on the state.

The model of state-society interpenetration from before 1918 – a mode of interaction between state and social actors which offered non-state figures or professional groups increasing influence on administrative decisions – remained intact, but not without subtle but significant alterations in the relationship. In both cases examined here,

59 Egry, 'Fallen between two stools'; It is also worth noting that Cobori and Benko were chairmen of the voluntary firefighters in Nitra and Murska Sobota, demonstrating how this type of association formed part of the imperial legacy all over the former Habsburg territories. However, a shift in the state-society relations is visible in these cases, too. Cobori was succeeded by Halachy and not another local politician. For Cobori, see: Prágai Magyar Hírlap 9. nr. 79. April 5, 1930. p. 9.

informality was crucial for the arrangement and modification of these relations. Voluntary firefighters were embedded informal structures in a formalized and state-sponsored hierarchy, while public notaries had to accept that their formal rights were informally curtailed by the state as a means of compromise on the question of their continued existence. On the surface, it was therefore only a small shift, proving the lasting significance of imperial arrangements. Informality, however, had been part of these relations before 1918. The changes, therefore, signaled more than just small shifts of the balance as they changed the character of the informality in play. In terms of informality, they were a reversal of the pre-1918 situation, but in this way they also reflected how the tension between normative statehood and functional statehood was handled with the help of informality.

Conclusions

In all of the aforementioned cases, local politics played an important role. Thus, before drawing conclusions, it is necessary to consider the continuities and discontinuities of local politics. Sometimes continuities were institutional, like the preservation of local electoral laws and systems in Polish Galicia or Hungary up to the early 1930s and late 1920s, respectively. The people in these countries voted locally according to an arrangement of limited and unequal suffrage in a process inherited from the nineteenth century, but did so against the backdrop of alleged democratization at the level of national politics. The continuation of local political institutions handed leverage to both local and national elites. At the intersection of these trends, Maramureș was a textbook case, still in 1940 ruled by the same elite of noble origins as before 1918 and serving the same purpose of central governments: votes at national elections in exchange for relative freedom in the internal affairs of the county.[60]

However, politicians often assumed the same extra-political roles as they did before 1918. I have already mentioned Corneanu and Dobrin, the alternating prefects of Caraș-Severin, who also assumed the same positions on companies' boards of directors that their Hungarian predecessors had occupied. While simple cronyism was part of these agreements, they entailed more than just mutually

60 Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands'.

advantageous private relationships. The presence of these local figures brought prestige for both local society and the companies themselves, ensured swift administrative procedures for the respective companies, and paradoxically provided new, more "modern" sources of middle-class income (i.e., in the form of dividends, board memberships, etc., in contrast to the traditional mode of income drawn from landed property). This basic exchange led to a more numerous and modern middle-class and a less noble elite. As such, this realignment in local social structures marked a process of change that was undergirded in part by imperial legacies.

Centre-periphery relations sometimes resembled pre-1918 models as well. Tyrol's Christian Socialists and their voters were just as suspicious of a distant Vienna in 1920 as they were in 1911, although not necessarily for the same reason. But their sense of difference in comparison to the inhabitants of other Austrian provinces – sometimes bordering on resentment toward them – did not diminish. Czechoslovak developmental policies in Subcarpathian Rus were analogous with Hungarian ones before 1918, both in their goals as well as their attitudes towards the locals, who were taken as subjects of a civilizing mission who could later be empowered with political autonomy.

Some of these continuities reflected structural factors, but the continuities often demonstrated the resilience of local societies vis-à-vis homogenization even before 1918. Discontinuities in politics, on the other hand, often changed the effects of institutional continuities. Outdated and narrow suffrage notwithstanding – as Károly Ignácz has demonstrated[61] – Social Democrats and Liberals were victorious in local politics in the outskirts of Budapest after the war and revolutions of 1918 brought about changes within the local elite. The relatively strong position of centralist Czechoslovak parties in southern Slovakia would not have been possible without the ascendance of Social Democracy and agrarianism in the wake of WWI.

The frequent accusation from regional politicians that the centre was 'colonizing' the new provinces was also not identical in every instance. What contemporaries meant by 'colonization' was probably the intrusive transformation of an area where local elites remained mainly subordinated to the centre – as in Prekmurje, where local elites

61 Ignácz, 'The Emergence'.

lost their traditional access to power via local landowners and the clergy. However, in Slovakia or Transylvania, the efficiency of anti-colonialist rhetoric relied more on the existence of a new, aspiring middle class with pre-1918 imperial experience that could more easily imagine itself as a new elite – equal to the new rulers or even more civilized – than as the subjects of a civilizing mission directed from the centre. Such aspirations and the means of their fulfillment were the precondition of anti-colonialist discourse in this context of political-economic versus imagined-civilizational asymmetries.

Finally, there were areas where radical transformations of state and society sidelined groups who would have tried to capitalize on their imperial experience. Fascist Istria, although equally part of the imperial setup and exhibiting similar social and political phenomena to other parts of Cisleithania before 1918, was hard to compare with Slovakia or Transylvania after 1924, not least because of the new institutional setup, specifically the narrowing of local politics by the Italian Fascist state. Nevertheless, imperial legacies in local politics were present everywhere, even in Istria.[62] While some of them – like the legal codes in force – impacted the new states through inertia,[63] in many cases they were used consciously.

Conscious use implies selection as well; selection often depended on the interplay of local contexts and national developments. The local party of pre-1918 political figure Artúr Spányi and the similar one in Nitra helping Cobori, for example, were successful after 1918 due in part to the extension of suffrage. But an important source of their success was the non-political legacy of local electoral politics in pre-WWI Hungary, which Spányi and Cobori could use for their own advantage. Polarization often taking the form of very deep antagonism between supporters and opponents of the 1867 Compromise was the basic tenet of party politics before 1918. Local politicians and administrators, who had to rely on government support for local development, wanted to avoid exposing local issues within this framework. Unless another issue – for example national divisions –

62 Ivan Jeličić, 'To Ensure Normal Administrative Order and to the Population's Greater Comfort? Aspects of Post-war Transition on the District of Volosca-Abbazia/Volosko-Opatija' *Südostfroschungen* 79 (2020): 96–123.
63 Natasha Wheatley, 'Legal Pluralism as Temporal Pluralism: Historical Rights, Legal Vitalism and Nonsynchronous Sovereignty', in: Dan Edelstein, Stephanos Geroulanos, Natasha Wheatley (eds.), *Power and Time. Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 53–79.

overtook local politics, depoliticization in the form of local parties involving both pro- and anti-Compromise figures served the goal of creating stability for local progress.

In the case of Czechoslovakia issues like Slovakia's autonomy played a similar role in national-level politics, generating antagonism which persisted. Moreover, with broader suffrage and proportional representation at the local level fragmented councils were the rule and not the exception. Therefore, finding compromises, setting an agenda that was detached from national politics was just as important as before 1918. In this process while local identification did not necessarily question national identity, it did help relegate it to a secondary role.

Another good example is the revolt of Transylvanian mayors against the disbanding of voluntary firefighters which was – paradoxically – successful because they were not elected. Local elections were postponed for national political reasons and city leaders – officials and council members – rather selected from a small local elite, which made their position stronger. It was certainly not the case that imperial legacies had a uniform effect everywhere in each successor state, and often not even the same legacies were significant within analogous contexts.

Thus, it is hard to sum up – at least at this stage of the work – the role of imperial legacies in the transition out of the Habsburg imperial framework and into the postimperial successor states comprehensively. Certainly, the legacy of the Habsburg Empire was rarely neglected. Often it was used consciously to pacify particular regions or social groups, but sometimes new states relented only because of the high costs of overcoming opposition. High-level capitalists in Budapest thought of fostering alliances with their peers in the successor states to gain leverage against French or English influence. But this kind of cooperation also involved a new division of the market and the acceptance as equal partners of those who had been in subordinate positions just a few years before. As explored in detail earlier in the text, this is precisely what happened with the Romanian industrialist Max Aușnit and the bank Marmorosch and Blank as they built their alliance with StEG and Reșița in the Banat. In another way, experts like Victor Hodor had leverage vis-à-vis the state that they could use to enhance their own career prospects, even when they did

not necessarily oppose the central state's goals. More generally, local elites could leverage their influence to avert local intervention by the central state, but also use that leverage to simply align their city or district or region's politics with the will of the centre.

Arrangements that involved imperial legacies seem to have been more abundant on the peripheries, but they were not absent from the centres either. Especially as the centres did not only shift, but also became situational. While imperial Vienna's and Budapest's political, economic, and cultural might worked hand-in-hand on the peripheries and was equally significant, after 1918 these aspects of imperial power became dispersed. Business centres of Austria-Hungary remained significant in the post-Habsburg space – at least until the Creditanstalt crisis in 1931 – and could retain a certain level of integration through their networks.[64] The superordinate reference points for local politics drifted away from Vienna and Budapest and towards the new successor state capitals. Indeed, postimperial power centres were sometimes beyond the borders of the former Empire. But practices of asymmetric rule placed administrative centres often closer to the peripheries, and if these were at least partly staffed with locals, it was again a channel of influence to use cleverly. Furthermore, political alliances with the centre sometimes helped to extend the scope of local rule, either formally or informally.

Perhaps the most significant legacy of the Empire was the furnishing of postimperial figures with expertise gained during the imperial period. Their expertise and mobility helped to connect distant and sometime disparate spaces. With the fragmentation of the former imperial space – a process that went beyond the mere carving out of territory for the successor states – their role was sometimes crucial for obtaining coherence within the state. Such figures were not limited to the administration, and their positions not necessarily symmetric, equally influential locally and in the centre, as Benko's career or the Maramureș case would suggest. For ordinary people, however, it was less the coherence of the legal system, the unification of education, or the judiciary that mattered, at least in more peripheral areas. Familiarity with the administration and intimacy with its

64 Andreas Resch, 'Under Pressure to Adapt: Corporate Business and the New Order in Post-1918 Central Europe', in: Günther Bischof, Fritz Plasser, Peter Berger (eds.), *From Empire to Republic: Post-World War I Austria* (New Orleans/Innsbruck: University of New Orleans Press / Innsbruck University Press, 2010), 336–369.

administrative culture legitimated the new states. Therefore, some of them went out of their way to provide such familiarity to their new inhabitants, often just informally, as was the case in Transylvania. Officials with a past in the Empire's structures had better chances to deliver familiarity to the local population, especially as the pre-1918 system had often relied on informal arrangements that were hard to learn from manuals and laws.[65]

Education, expertise, experience, mobility, knowledge, and new sources of income: these are characteristics shown by the individuals discussed here. They suggest a common, middle-class background either by birth or achieved by mobility. Neither the aristocracy nor the officer corps – social bodies most commonly seen as the pillars of the Empire – perpetuated Austria-Hungary. Rather, it was those from the middle class who had been in conflict over national issues before 1918 that wound up perpetuating the structures of Empire. On the whole, this confirms Wolfgang Göderle's thesis about the middle-class Empire and the increasing role of this social stratum in the transformation of Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, if we look at how the late Habsburg Empire – according to Peter Becker[66] – engaged with society, that is, how it established new forms and institutions of state-society interpenetration that sometimes substituted for political democratization, we again find the middle class playing a decisive role.

However, if my assumption is correct, it becomes even more important to look at the changes within this middle class around 1918. Members of this class were increasingly becoming intertwined with local elites in the peripheral regions, but also in the outskirts of metropoles. As the middle class was supposed to play a dominant role in the successor states, as the backbone of the new titular nations, filling the most important positions, its role in the former Empire seems even more significant. However, the new middle class also faced rivals and challengers from within (for Czechs, the Slovaks) and from without (for Croats, the Serbs; for Transylvanian Romanians, Old Kingdom Romanians and vice-versa). As representatives of this former imperial middle class they soon discovered that their middle-class societal culture often differed from those in the new centres but

65 Popovici and Pál, 'The Transformation'; Egry, 'Zárványok'.
66 Becker, 'The Administrative Apparatus under Reconstruction'.

in turn connected them with some of their previous "opponents".

Such interethnic entanglements were convenient in drawing the boundaries against some unwelcome figures, often co-ethnics from the new centres.[67] Moreover, these practices put the Empire on the map again and reconnected a middle class – now ostensibly on both sides of the ethnic divide of minorities and majorities – that once ran the Empire, even if its access to the most significant roles within imperial institutions was undeniably uneven. But in whichever roles they contributed to imperial rule, they were nevertheless instrumental in defining the terms of interpenetration between state and society, creating familiar administrative cultures, running associations, and setting the terms of what constituted authentic knowledge – all legacies of the successor states, too.[68]

Looking beyond individuals and the middle class, listing a few – and certainly not exhaustive – structural features of this imperial legacy can demonstrate its patchwork character as well. The dissolution of Austria-Hungary broke apart certain aspects of its overarching imperial space (academia, economy, law, politics, etc.) and created new but overlapping geographies with alternating and shifting centres but covering the same space as before 1918. But the relevant scales within this space changed as well. Before 1918, the dualist Monarchy was integrated in transimperial networks, creating an imperial (albeit somewhat bifurcated) internal space within which differentiated rule was established towards Cisleithanian provinces and Hungarian counties.[69] Underneath this second tier of power relations and administration, there was a local world to engage with and administer – the world of districts, statuary cities, and municipalities. After 1918, what was retained from the imperial economic space became transnational. Political power resided in national capitals, increasingly affecting economic power.

67 Gábor Egry, 'Front-line, No-man's Land or Fortress? The Hungarian Minority Elite in Romania between National Identity and Regional Self-consciousness (1918-1944)' *Auxiliary Historical Disciplines* VI (2011): 168–188.
68 Wolfgang Göderle, 'Wolfgang Göderle: Postwar: The Social Transformation of Empire in 19th Century Europe. Scientific Knowledge, Hybridity and the Legitimacy of Imperial Rule' *Acta Histriae* 28/4 (2020): 511–540.
69 Gábor Egry, 'Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics, Local Accommodations. Center-Periphery Struggles in Late Dualist Hungary', in: Bernard Bachinger, Wolfram Dornik, Stephan Lehnstaedt (eds.), *Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen. Nationalismen und Rivalitäten im Habsburgerreich um 1900* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 333–353.

At the same time, the provincial scale – excepting the federal principles that structured interwar Austria – became marginal, more symbolic than concrete and legally circumscribed, rather an often symbolic resource for politics conducted beneath the national level.[70] Therefore, regions – the crucial building blocks of the Empire – were rather (re)constituted through middle-class cultures and their conscious use as a means of delineating cultural/civilizational hierarchies or authentic and less authentic national spaces. Delineation happened through ethnic features, and through informal settlements between elites instead of through official, legal, or structural differentiation. Regional elites could achieve at most the establishing of asymmetric institutions of administration, but not a formalized regional government. Local worlds, however, remained where they were – at the bottom, still beneath the regional level. Thus, for an analysis of differentiated rule, the local replaced the province or the county in the postimperial period, not least because of the shrinking size of imperial successor states.

Against the backdrop of these changes, the imperial legacy of differentiated rule could have manifested itself in the relation between new centres and much smaller geographical units, maybe offering better leverage for local elites than they had had before, despite their relative weakness in resources. Within this context, some elements of the previous imperial rulebook were useful and obvious to touch upon, although they needed to be adjusted to the context and scale of national states. Political leadership in the nation-states, moreover, gradually came to the conclusion that at least some form of differentiation – even if it was hidden behind the facade of homogeneity and uniformity – was helpful for the practical functioning of the state and the preservation of political stability at all levels of administration.

However, without changing the normative state – that is, by replacing the idea of the nation-state with an alternative concept of statehood – the result of such arrangements of differentiated rule were often temporary. Change could easily occur if the broader context shifted, giving more salience to nationalist homogenization, pushing national elites to change their perception of whether and to what extent they should intervene in local worlds. Furthermore, without a change in normative conceptions of statehood, administrative practices that contradicted the idea of the nation-state, and which manifested differentiated rule, were easily labelled as unnecessary and eventually eliminated. State-building certainly did not end in the late 1920s, and indeed the process took a sharper turn in the crisis-ridden 1930s. Thus, it is legitimate to see this short, decade-long period as only transitory, and not a potentially stable solution to the question of how the successor states ought to have integrated their internal divisions. This was not a conscious design built into these states, but only a somewhat coincidental construct, the accidental nature of which was also reflected in the patchwork character of the imperial legacies these states were built upon. Accepting this perspective also means that it is hard to dismiss the following question: Was the construction and consolidation of postimperial successor states a fundamentally imperial process, even if the legacies of the Habsburg Empire were used instrumentally?

70 Gábor Egry, 'A Crossroad of Parallels: Regionalism and Nation-Building in Transylvania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in: Anders Blomqvist, Constantin Iordachi, Balazs Trencsenyi (eds.), *Hungary and Romania Beyond National Narratives: Comparisons and Entanglements: Comparison and Entanglements* (Bern: Peter Lang Academic Publishers, 2013), 239-276.

Dissolution of Austria-Hungary

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The Empire's New Clothes.
How Austria-Hungary's Legacy Kept the Successor States Running

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